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Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

Fact Sheet

June 1998

Hazardous Air Pollutants

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Q — What are hazardous air pollutants?

A The federal Clean Air Act of 1970 required the USEPA to determine which air emissions should be regulated to protect public health and the environment. These emissions are called Hazardous Air Pollutants (HAPs). HAPs include organic chemicals, chlorinated solvents, selected pesticides, heavy metals and hydrochloric and hydrofluoric acids.

The USEPA tried to determine which chemicals should be listed by identifying which chemicals presented a known risk to public health. However, by 1990, National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAPs) had been established for only seven pollutants (asbestos, arsenic, benzene, beryllium, mercury, radionuclides, and vinyl chloride) because of the difficulty in identifying which HAPs present a known risk to public health and then determining acceptable levels for each HAP.

Q — Which sources will be affected by the new regulations?

A The 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act instructed the USEPA to develop NESHAPs based upon technological standards. The USEPA has identified 174 categories of stationary emission sources that release 188 different HAPs. Sources include dry cleaners, electroplaters, and refineries. The USEPA, working in conjunction with states, the regulated community, and environmental activists, is developing a NESHAP for each of the 174 source categories. Part of each NESHAP will be a technological standard, called Maximum Achievable Control Technology (MACT). MACT for a source will list technology that must be used to control emissions of HAPs. Alternately, under the NESHAP for the source category, a source may use another technology as long as it is as effective in its control of HAPs as the MACT standard.

Q — When will these new standards be in effect?

A The U.S. EPA set a schedule ending in the year 2000 by which rules are to be in place for the 174 source categories. Categories with many sources are placed earlier in the schedule; those with fewer common sources are placed closer to the year 2000. As rules are developed for each category, those affected sources are required to implement the new standards within three years or upon start-up if the source is new.

Q — How will these new standards be implemented?

A Major sources of HAPs must obtain a federal Clean Air Act Permit through the Illinois EPA. A major source is one that has the potential to emit 10 tons per year of any one HAP or 25 tons of a combination of HAPs. However, for some smaller sources, U.S. EPA is deferring for five years the requirement to obtain a Clean Air Act permit. In Illinois, if a source qualifies for deferment, it must still obtain a state operating permit or register with the Illinois EPA.

Q — What is being done about hazardous air pollutants from mobile sources?

A Mobile sources release large amounts of HAPs like formaldehyde and benzene. New federal regulations require vehicle, marine and other engine manufacturers to produce cleaner-burning engines and also use cleaner alternative fuels to help reduce the amounts of HAPs from mobile sources. Also, the Illinois EPA's Vehicle Emissions Testing Program identifies which cars are the worst polluters and requires the owners to make necessary repairs so the vehicles meet emissions standards.

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